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RUEHDS/AMEMBASSY ADDIS ABABA 0053
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RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI
RUEPADJ/CJTF-HOA CAMP LEMONIER
RUEKDIA/DIA WASHDC
RUEHLMC/MILLENNIUM CHALLENGE CORPORATION
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 ANTANANARIVO 000077

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR AF/E, S/CT AND INR
DEPT PLEASE PASS TO PEACE CORPS FOR DIRECTOR TSCHETTER
CJTF-HOA FOR ADMIRAL HUNT
ADDIS ABABA FOR AFRICAN UNION
PARIS FOR AFRICA WATCHER

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PMIL](#) [PINR](#) [EFIN](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [KISL](#) [CN](#)
SUBJECT: COMOROS PRESIDENT WELCOMES U.S. COOPERATION

REF: A. ANTANANARIVO 0060
[1](#)B. ANTANANARIVO 0053

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Classified By: Ambassador James D. McGee for reasons 1.4 B & D

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: The President of the Union of the Comoros, Ahmed Abdallah Sambi, met with the Ambassador January 18 and with Peace Corps Director Ronald Tschetter January 19 on the margins of the investiture of Madagascar's President Marc Ravalomanana (Ref A). Sambi reaffirmed his desire for assistance from the U.S., to include: a request for military induction training for 150 new recruits, assistance in observing the three island-level elections in April/May 2007, budget support, infrastructure support, and English language training. He also promised continued counter-terrorism cooperation and urged the return of an official U.S. presence in the Comoros, welcoming a diplomatic presence and/or a return of the Peace Corps. END SUMMARY.

[1](#)2. (C) Comoran President Sambi traveled to Madagascar several days ahead of Ravalomanana's investiture to conduct outreach with the Comoran diaspora, first in Mahajunga and then in the capital. He told the Ambassador that over 2,000 Comorans study in Madagascar on renewable - and expensive - one-year visas. The GOC has sought longer-term and lower-cost visas for several years, but Madagascar has so far been unwilling, due to security concerns and revenue benefits, to change its policy. Sambi's warm words of praise for his "brother" Ravalomanana at the post-investiture celebration appeared to be part of a charm offensive designed to obtain some movement on this issue.

[1](#)3. (SBU) Asked by the Ambassador about the recent labor strikes and volcanic eruption in the Comoros (Ref B), Sambi said that visiting geologists from the neighboring island of Reunion reported the eruption was calming. He described eruptions on a seven-month cycle as the present pattern, whereas they had occurred every seven years in the recent past. Regarding the strikes, he said the Ministry of Finance had signed an agreement with the taxi operators to repair the roads. Sambi appeared sympathetic with the strikers, but pointed out that the fundamental problem was that the Island

Governments collected the vehicle fees and then expected the Union Government to repair the roads.

¶4. (SBU) Sambi further described some of the Island-Union tensions. For example, in the Union constitution, the island leaders are called "Chef de l'Executif" whereas they are called "President" in the separate island constitutions. He expected all three island "presidents" not to be re-elected in the upcoming April/May elections and indicated that he would be supporting alternate candidates. He said the parliament had just voted a law requiring all sitting island officials to vacate their posts 90 days before the elections if they were to be candidates. He hoped this would reduce the power of incumbency. He had also sent his two Vice Presidents to South Africa to meet with President Mbeki in an effort to secure international observers for the island elections to help ensure free, fair and peaceful elections. The Ambassador assured Sambi that the U.S. Mission would send some observers from Madagascar but thought it unlikely that any Washington-based assistance would be available.

¶5. (C) As part of his effort to dilute island-based loyalties and enhance allegiance to the Union, Sambi said he plans to expand the Army of National Development (AND) by adding 150 new recruits. He hoped to instill new discipline in these youth as opposed to the older military leaders, many of whom had been corrupted by the Comoros' history of secession and coups. Sambi asked the Ambassador if U.S. military advisors might be available for several months to assist in the basic training of these new recruits. The Ambassador promised to forward this request to the U.S. military leadership.

¶6. (SBU) Sambi then described the budgetary challenges he faces and the international assistance he needs. He stated that the government's entire budget was only USD 60 million, of which 65 per cent went to salaries and the other 35 per

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cent to government operations and payment of foreign debt. This leaves his government nothing for development. Having declared 2007 "The Year of Construction" Sambi asked whether the U.S. could provide any assistance with heavy equipment - brick-making machinery for housing growth, wells and pumps for improving water supply, generators for power supply, as well as trucks and earth-moving equipment. The Ambassador replied that the U.S. could not provide budget support, but might be willing to assist the International Monetary Fund's effort at securing debt relief under the Highly Indebted Poor Countries Initiative (HIPC). Regarding the infrastructure needs, the Ambassador noted that a Civil Affairs team from Combined Joint Task Force - Horn of Africa was preparing to engage in rebuilding several schools on the islands. The Ambassador also suggested a continued effort by the Comoros to qualify for a Millennium Challenge Account compact.

¶7. (S) Observing that the upheaval in Somalia might lead to the dispersal of some of the international terrorists, the Ambassador sought Sambi's assurance that the GOC would cooperate in apprehending any that might seek shelter in the Comoros. Sambi commented that he had heard the wife of Harun Fazul, alleged mastermind of the 1998 Embassy bombings in East Africa, had been caught crossing the Kenyan border. Sambi said that he thought Fazul himself, though of Comoran origin, was unlikely to seek shelter in his homeland. However Sambi assured the Ambassador that the Comoros would continue cooperating in the effort to monitor for Fazul's presence.

¶8. (U) Sambi stressed to the Ambassador that the GOC would warmly welcome the return of a permanent U.S. diplomatic presence in the Comoros. In his meeting with Peace Corps Director Tschetter, Sambi again laid out the urgency of his infrastructure needs. In addition, he acknowledged how important and useful the return of a Peace Corps presence might be, especially for teaching English. Sambi lamented that many scholarship opportunities for Comoran students are

lost because they lack the necessary English language qualifications. Others go abroad on short-term programs but then derive only modest benefit due to the language barrier.

19. (C) COMMENT. Sambi appeared relaxed and comfortable in his hour-long meeting with the Ambassador. Perhaps that was because he was abroad. At home, Sambi faces enormous difficulties. Although elected in a landslide, his government lacks the resources to deliver on its promises and, to judge by the labor strikes he has faced, his honeymoon period seems to be ending. The inter-island tensions remain, and these are likely to be exacerbated in the run-up to the island elections. Should these prove to be free and fair, and if "president" Bacar of Sambi's home island of Anjouan loses, then Sambi may gain some political room to focus on his highest priority - the economic development of his nation. Even modest U.S. resources to help him achieve this goal would be warmly welcomed. END COMMENT.

McGEE